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ABSTRACT

Seeking to identify intervention strategies that classroom teachers can use to develop healthy self-concepts in learners, this paper provides a review of communication research on self-concept and its pedagogical implications. The first section of the paper reviews research on selected salient influences on self-concept, including work on racial influences, social status, personal factors, parental influences, learning successes in school, classroom atmosphere, and teacher self-concept. The second section examines the relationship between self-concept and academic achievement, with discussions of teacher interpersonal behavior and pedagogical strategies that enhance student self-concept. The final section of the paper considers the importance of teachers developing effective interpersonal communication skills, awareness of their own perceptions of students, awareness of student attitudes, and positive expectations about student performance. (RL)

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INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR SELF - CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

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INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR SELF - CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

The influence of self-concept on classroom behavior and performance has been of continual interest to educators and researchers for many years, and speech communication research has verified that relationship. Over the last twenty-five years, at last fourteen articles dealing directly with self-concept have appeared in the communicaton literature (Brocks & Jandt, 1971; Brooks & Platz, 1968; Dieker, Crane, & Brown, 1971; Ferullo, 1963; Furr, 1970; Jandt & Hilyard, 1975; Judd, 1973; 1979; Judd & Smith, 1974; 1977; Karre, 1976; Miyamoto, Crowell, & Katcher, 1955; 1956; and Ober & Jandt, 1973). What has not been studied equally is how to influence the development of a healthy self-concept in the learner. What intervention strategies are available to the classroom teacher? This paper addresses that question. The proceedure used in this essay is one of: (1) reviewing the self-concept literature to discover, summarize, and evaluate the state of the art relative to self-concept development and inflences of and on self-concept in the classroom; and (2) based upon that review, extracting pedagogical implicatcns and principles for the classroom teacher.

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF SELF - CONCEPT LITERATURE RELATIVE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF - CONCEPT

Self-concept development, perhaps the most widely researched of the many areas of self-concept, has focused, for the most part, on the formative history of the young student. Formative history encompasses the attitudes, beliefs and values that the student brings to the classroom prior to the initiation of the specific educational endeavor at hand. The student's conceptualization of self as a person and as a learner are important variables in the learning process. Research indicates that among those salient influences are: race, social status, physical appearance, parental influences, expectations and attitudes, learning successes in school, classroom atmosphere, and the teacher's self-concept.

SELECTED SALIENT INFLUENCES ON SELF - CONCEPT

Racial Influence. Comparisons between Black and white pupils comprise the majority of racial self-concept studies. Initially, researchers tended to conclude that Blacks have low self-concepts (cf. Clark & Clark, 1939; Mussen, 1953; and Stevenson & Stewart, 1958). Recent research has focused on factors other than race to determine the cause of the differences in self-concepts between Blacks and whites (Curtis & Bennett, 1978). Currently, such influences as

integration (Busk, Ford & Schulman, 1973; and Shaw, 1974) and socio-economic status (Cicirelli, 1977) are being identified as being more important than race alone in self-concept development. Integration allows for competition between the races, and low socio-economic status, regardless of race, creates a negative self perception. Both of these factors are vitally important in a child's self-concept development. They are so important that Calhoun, Kurfiss, and Warren (1976) claim: "low self-concept or self-esteem are not necessarily correlates of minority group membership . . . Contrary to conventional view, it is the environment rather than racial factors that plays a significant role in developing children's perceptions of themselves" (p. 132).

While this recent research suggests that race is not the causative factor in self-concept differences between Black and white pupils, race may prove to be a significant formative force for other minority groups. Leonetti and Muller (1976) indicate racial differences contribute a key influence in the Spanish-surnamed child's self-concept development. Since the Spanish-surnamed child brings a different set of cultural norms into the classroom, school can create anxiety, confusion, and a disorientation of values. The Spanish child is 'caught in the middle' in the skin color difference between Blacks and whites. Differences in language usage also poses a problem for the Spanish child. When "Spanish slips out," the white children in the class tend to view this as a sign of lower social

status. The fact that many Spanish - surnamed children are of a lower socio-economic status than Anglos tends to foster this belief. Therefore, the classroom experience can create a negative image of the Spanish-surnamed child as a learner.

Social Status. The effects of a student's social status are receiving increasing attention by self-concept researchers. Research has already shown socio-economic status to be equally, if not more important than race in self-concept development (Calhoun, Kurfiss & Warren, 1976; Cicirelli, 1977; Cookston & Mason, 1977; and Leonetti & Muller, 1976). Deosaran's (1977) research indicates that self-concept plays a mediating role between social class and educational expectations when mental ability is controlled.

Personal Factors. Student self-concept has been related to first-name desirability and appearance. Garwood (1976) found students with teacher-rated desirable first-names to have higher self-concept scores than students with undesirable first-names. Musa and Roach (1973) reported high school girls to be more unhappy with their phyiscal appearance than boys, as reflected in their lower self-concept scores. Zongker (1977) found pregnant adolescent girls to have lower self-concepts than non-pregnant girls, although a causal relationship was not established.

Parental Influences. The early school years exert a powerful influence on self-concept growth and development. A 1976 study report that 50% of first graders and 35% of third graders believed their parents expected too much of them (Stenner & Katzenmeyer, 1976b). These attitudes evolve from experiences and interactons which occur in the classroom. They also reflect the influence of the home environment on self-concept growth. Flynn (1976) observed that children of parents who used a "firm but fair" approach to authority had higher self-concepts than children whose parents were either too lenient or too severe in their exercising of parental control. Flynn's research, while not conclusive, also suggests that parental marital satisfaction influences the child's self-concept. Finally, the influence of the early school years on a child's self-concept has been illustrated in career guidance studies. Schmidt (1976) argues that elementary students who possess a high self-concept are more open to learning about careers and relating those careers to themselves. He therefore advocates a classroom program to enhance student self-concept.

Learning Successes in School. The student's learning history may affect self-concept growth and development. Recent research has focused on both the very young student, and the older returning student. While there have been relatively few studies which examined the relationship between non-promotion and self-concept (Koons, 1977), Finlayson (1977) attempted to causally relate the two by

administering self-concept measures to first graders prior to and after the school year, and again at the end of the second grade. The results of the study indicated that non-promotion did not cause a decline in self-concept when compared to promoted and borderline students.

A positive image of self-as-learner is important to the returning adult college student. Plotsky (1974) noted that the returning female student had a positive academic self-concept from her previous academic experience. He further argues that a positive image of self-as-learner is a critical factor for successful performance by adult students.

Classroom Atmosphere. A number of research studies have attempted to determine the influence of open classrooms on student self-concept. Studies have indicated students in an open classroom have a higher attitude toward self (Cookston & Mason, 1977) and that males with low reading achievement have a higher self-concept than those in traditional classrooms (Cookston & Mason, 1977). Other research has reported no differences in self-concept by type of classroom organization (Drummond, Cobb & McIntire, 1976; and Klaff & Docherty, 1975). Finally, one study indicates that when the teacher and students are moved from a traditional classroom to a new open facility self-concept decreases (Cookston & Mason, 1977). One explanation of these inconsistent findings lies in the fluid nature of lower primary students' self-concept (Drummond, Cobb &

McIntire, 1976; and Klaff & Docherty, 1975), since they are the most frequent subject sample utilized in open classroom/self-concept studies.

Teacher Self-Concept. The teacher's self-concept is an important classroom variable. In order to provide a positive influence upon student self-concept, the teacher must have a positive self-concept (Purkey, 1970). Teachers must be able to deal with their own problems so as not to interject them into the classroom. Therefore, having a positive self-concept would appear to be a prerequisite for effective teachers. This assertion can be supported as self-social feelings of student teachers have been related to creativity factors and attitudes about teacher practices (Holman & White, 1978). Research further indicates that teacher self-concept is related positively to student cognitive growth (Aspy & Buhler, 1975) and self-concept development (Edeburn & Landry, 1976).

Since teacher self-concept is highly influential in the educational process, increasing attention is being directed toward teacher education programs. Some researchers have suggested that prospective teachers be evaluated on measures of self-concept in addition to their intellectual ability (Aspy & Buhler, 1975). Modifications in teacher education programs has also been advocated. Campbell (1979) reported Black student teachers improved their their overall self-esteem when a teacher education program was designed especially to meet their specific needs. The utilization of

a process skills training program which would facilitate teacher development of self has also been advocated (Campbell & Martinez-Perez, 1977).

One reason for these suggested modifications is evidenced in the research of Milgram and Milgram (1976). They discovered that not only may elementary school teachers be lower in intellectual ability and scholastic achievement than their secondary counterparts, but that they also hold lower self-concepts. Due to the importance of those fluid years in a child's self-concept development, this research is particularly disconserting.

While the issue of self-concept development has been subjected to extensive research, we are just beginning to understand its ramifications in the educational arena. Clearly, the literature cited indicates differences in self-concept among students exists. The effects of those differences are worthy of consideration.

SELF - CONCEPT AND ACADEMIC ACHEIVEMENT

Self-concept and academic achievement has received considerable research attention. Purkey summarized a myriad of studies in 1970. He concluded "that there is a persistent and significant relationship between self-concept and academic achievement" (p. 27). More specifically, self-concept of ability has been found to be a better predictor

of academic acheivement than intelligence (Henien, 1978; Purkey, 1970; and Stenner & Katzenmeyer, 1976a). A strong relationship between academic self-concept and educational expectations has also been reported (Deosaran, 1977; and Henien, 1978). Research further indicates that the underachiever holds an unflattering view of self as a learner (Purkey, 1970) while high self-concept students attribute successful outcomes to their high ability (Ames, 1978). However, the recent failure to reveal a significant relationship between self-concept and the discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic achievement (Gold, 1978), leaves the nature of the relationship of self-concept and academic achievement open to question.

One explanation of these conflicting reports lies in the large number of independent variables which influence both self-concept and academic achievement. Research from socio-economic status (cf. Cicirelli, 1977; and Harari & McDavid, 1973) to first name-stereotyping (Garwood, 1976) has been shown to influence both self-concept and academic achievement. Conceivably, however, research descrepancies can be explained in terms of the relationship between self-concept consistency and academic achievement. Cormier (1978) discovered that students with high self-concept consistency showed significantly higher academic achievement then did students with medium or low self-concept consistency. This led Cormier to argue that "consistency of a student's self-concept was a necessary condition for high

academic achievement. Regardless of the magnitude of the self-concept, if the self-concept was structured consistently then the student tended toward high academic achievement. Hence, self-concept inconsistency may be as valuable as poor self-concept in the attempt to understand underachievement" (Cormier, 1978). If correct, Cormier may have isolated an important variable in identifying the influence of self-concept on academic achievement.

Researchers have also examined the relationship of self-concept and academic achievement in specific content areas. Science teachers have discovered a relationship exists between science achievement and science self-concept (Doran & Sellers, 1978), and between self-concept and the ability to work independently on problems (Shymansky, Penick, Matthews & Good, 1977). Researchers in verbal learning style discovered a curvilinear relationship between self-concept and verbal ability, as the average or moderately high self-concept child was the most efficient in learning new material (August, Rychlak & Felker, 1975).

The advent of mainstreaming generated increased interest in studies of self-concept of learning disabled students. Research indicates that learning disabled students have a lower self-concept than normal students (Ribner, 1978; Rosenberg & Gaier, 1977; and Tolar, Tolar & Blumin, 1977). Half-day mainstreaming, however, can produce an improvement in both self-concept and academic achievement (Calhoun & Elliott, 1977). Since students use classroom

groups as a means of comparison in forming conceptualizations of themselves, researchers warned that total mainstreaming could produce disastrous results on the learning disabled child's self-concept and academic achievement (Rogers, Smith & Ccleman, 1978; and Smith, Dokecki & Davis, 1977). This hypothesis is partly confirmed by Ribner's (1978) observation that minimally brain damaged children placed in regular classrooms had lower self-concepts of school adequacy than students with similar disabilties, although no differences were found in general competence.

While, by no means complete, the research thus far tends to confirm Purkey's (1970) claim that a persistent and significant relationship between self-concept and academic achievement exists. The efficacy of this knowledge can best be judged by the pedagogical strategies employed by classroom teachers to enhance student self-concept development.

ENHANCING STUDENT SELF - CONCEPT

Teacher Interpersonal Behavior. In order for the teacher to aid students in developing positive self conceptualizations, teachers must establish themselves as a significant other in the child's life (Johnsen & Medley, 1978; and Purkey, 1970). Realizing the difficulty in establshing such a prominent position, Purkey suggests the

main task of the teacher lies in averting the development of detrimental learning attitudes.

Positive learning attitudes are fostered through a positive classroom climate and interpersonal relations with students as "persons." Research indicates that an open classroom climate is related to high self-esteem, whereas a closed climate is related to low self-esteem (Cookston & Mason, 1977). The open climate is characterized by warmth and acceptance, and open channels of communication. Purkey (1970) notes that research has identified six key teacher climate / behavior elements: (1) presenting the students with a challenge, (2) giving them the freedom to meet established goals, while at the same time, (3 maintaining overall classroom control (permissiveness tends to lower self-esteem), (4) displaying warmth, (5) demonstrating respect for the students as individuals, and (6) providing an atmosphere of success.

The interpersonal behavior of the teacher is a key determinant of classroom climate and student self-concept. The research literature is replete with studies illustrating this phenomenon. Pupils of teachers who are direct are more likely to have high self-concepts than pupils of teachers who are indirect (Cookston & Mason, 1977). Teachers who use positive reinforcement abundantly have been associated with higher student self-concept of academic ability scores (Van Horn, 1976). Teacher use of praise-modeling can be employed in predicting student self-concept scores (Brady, Figuerres,

Felker & Garrison, 1978). Pupils of teachers who report unacceptable performances in a positive manner are not impaired in learning task performaces. Whereas, teachers who provide such reports in which they emphasize the unacceptabilty of low ability, have a negative effect on pupil learning task performance (Sharp & Muller, 1978). Summarily, based on his research, Spencer (1976) argues that teacher interpersonal influence mediates between structural factors, such as socio-economic status and mental ability, and self-concept of ability, so that no direct substantive connection exists.

The pedagogical strategies teachers employ also affect student self-concept and academic achievement. Teachers who employ an informational pedagogical model of teaching (Van Horn, 1976) or use in-depth study as compared to the expository method (Cookston & Mason, 1977) have been associated with higher student self-concept scores. Higher self-concept scores hs also been related to the use of team teaching (Cookston & Mason, 1977). The use of tutors can also have a bolstering effect upon a student's self-concept (Cookston & Mason, 1977; and Sanacore, 1975).

Pedagogical Strategies. Many of the recent publications readily available to the classroom teacher on self-concept enhancement seem to be highly anecdotal in nature. These brief articles provide information about what the author does in his or her classroom. Seldom do they offer either a rationale for the activity or an explanation

of the impact, if any, upon student self-concept enhancement (cf. Campbell, 1978; Dial, 1976; Hamilton, 1976; and Schmidt, 1976).

Researchers have advanced some very specific instructional techniques of improving a student's self-concept. Research indicates that changing self perception brings about changes in behavior (Heim, 1977). This precept is illustrated by Garner's (1974) videotaping student classroom behavior. Once students observed their behavior, they began to take responsibility for their actions and sought to modify their behavior toward the positive norm.

Sanacore (1975), a reading researcher, has summarized methods teachers can employ to enhance pupil self-concept. He suggests the use of behavioral objectives, which enables students to set obtainable academic goals. Once the student meets the objective, this achievement should be complimented, as the use of praise may instill a desire to succeed. Repetition of tasks, for mastery learning, can also be effective in bolstering student self-concept. Bibliotherapy is suggested as a means for the student to vicariously experience the problems faced by others by reading about them, thus making the student aware that others share similar problems.

However, not all of the research in instructional techniques to enhance pupil self-concept has yeilded positive results. A program of learning resource centers in a regular classroom did not prove to enhance the self-

concept's of the learning disabled children in the class (Sheare, 1978).

A growing body of literature indicates that global instructional programs which seek to improve student self-concept have, at best, produced moderate success. A six-week teacher-taught unit on self-concept has been developed for use in junior high school classrooms (Schulman, Ford & Busk, 1973). Upon analysis of its effectivenss, the researchers concluded: "that it is possible to develop a teacher-taught self-concept enhancement program that will produce a desired effect," . . . although, "the degree of improvement noted may be of doubtful clinical significance in the case of any individual child" (p. 486). Similarly, a training program designed to help teachers understand and apply classroom methods of increasing self-rewarding behavior of children produced "moderate changes" (Felker, Stanwyck & Day, 1973). Additionally, communication research has reported that the mere experience of a basic speech communication course is not the causative factor in improving student self-perception as a communicator (Brooks & Platz, 1968; Furr, 1970; Judd, 1973; and Miyamoto, Crowell & Katcher, 1956), although conflicting evidence exists (Dieker, Crane & Brown, 1971; and McCroskey, 1967).

Therefore, it seems that the efficacy of global programs which attempt to enhance an entire classroom's self-concept is highly suspect. Research which compared a self-concept enhancement model of instruction to a skills

development model found the latter to be more closely related to academic achievement (Calsyn & Kenney, 1977). The results were

> . . . more supportive of a skill development model in which academic achievement is causally predominant over self-concept of ability as well as perceived evaluation of others, rather than a two-stage self enhancement model in which perceived evaluation of others are causally predominant over self-concept of ability, which in turn is causally predominant over academic achievement. Apparently adolescent's performance in school more often affects their self-concept of ability and their perception of others' assessment of that ability than others' perception of ability leads to changes in self-concept of ability, which in turn leads to changes in academic performance" (p. 144).

This section has offered a review of the educational self-concept literature. The implications of this literature are now discussed.

INTERVENTION IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

The research literature reviewed is replete with studies which indicated a relationship between self-concept and academic achievement. The utility of this knowledge is predicated upon the assumption that teachers will, in some way, "discover" the student's self-concept. However, relatively little attention is given to <u>how</u> the teacher is to obtain such information. The conscientious educator, therefore, is faced with three options. First, each pupil's self-concept can be empirically tested. Pragmatically, most teachers have neither the time nor the expertise required to select, interpret, and analyze scores from the multiplicity of measurement instruments available. Second, teachers can infer student self-concept from observation and self-disclosure (Bassett & Smythe, 1979; Penticuff, 1976; and Sanacore, 1975). Again, practical limitations raise questions as to the workability of this method. Since the observations must be conducted in a variety of settings (Bassett & Smythe, 1979), and disclosure theory indicates the importance of intimacy (Johnson & Medley, 1978; and Purkey, 1970), it appears likely that the term will be half over befoe the teacher would have adequate information in order to make reasonable inferences about pupil self-concept. Third, global self-concept enhancement programs, which have the underlying assumption that no one has yet

achieved their ideal self-concept, can be implemented. As noted, these programs have, at best, proven only moderately successful.

The educator who turns to the research literature to gather information about pupil self-concept may quickly become confused. There are two possible causes for this confusion to ensue. First, no consistent construct of self-concept is employed throughout the literature (Calhoun & Morse, 1977; Germain, 1978; and Judd, 1979). Under the broad rubric of "self perception," the literature refers to self-concept, self-concept of ability, self-concept of school abililty, academic self-concept, self-esteem, and self-image. Second, the measurement techniques employed vary widely. A multiplicity of measurement instruments have been utilized. Even though some indexes have been widely employed, for example, Coopersmith Self-Concept Index, Tennessee Self-Concept Index, and Piers-Harris Self-Concept Inventory, indexes have been found to measure differing constructs of self (McIntire, 1976; and Wylie, 1961; 1974).

Since an accurate assessment of student self-concept may be beyond the grasp of many classroom teachers and the research literature may prove to be more confusing than helpful, educators must be made cognizant of the potential implications of their behavior upon student self-concept, in order to prevent the development of negative learning attitudes. Recognition of these implications is of vital importance in examining teacher communicative behavior in

the classroom. These implications are examined in terms of teacher awareness, expectaticns and behavior.

AWARENESS

Teachers who know their students and the self-concept literature are in the best position to foster high student self-concept and academic achievement. Cptimal teacher effectiveness requires an awareness of teacher-held student perceptions and student attitudes.

Teacher-Held Student Perceptions. Cur core beliefs about our race, appearance, and name form the bases of our identity. Teachers must be aware of the stereotypes they hold in regard to their students core beliefs. Teachers should nct attritube a low self-concept to Blacks based solely on race, as it is not the causative factor. However, teachers should realize that with other minority groups, race may play a more significant role in self conceptualizations. Particular attention shculd be given to Spanish-surnamed pupils, and perhaps to other minority groups for whom English is a second language, in order to prevent the development of negative learner attitudes. Teachers must also be aware of the possibilty that they use first-name stereotyping in their interaction with and evaluation of pupils. Awareness of the potentialily of these stereotypes is the first step in their elimination from the classroom.

Student Attitudes. Although a comprehensive knowledge of each pupil may not be possible, the more information a teacher has about the student, the better the teacher's position to bolster pupil self-concept. If for example, the teacher is aware of parental marital dissatisfaction, then the teacher may expect the child to manifest the effects of this dissatisfaction through a lowered self-concept.

Educators must also be aware of the social comparisons which occur in classrooms. Recognizing that socioeconomic status affects self-concept at all educational levels, educators must be cognizant of the social comparisons which are particularly relevant to their students. Social comparisons may prove to be most significant in the early primary grades, since student self-concept at that age appears to be extremely fluid. Social comparisons are also significant for adolescent girls, as they seem to be more concerned about their appearance than boys. At the college level, it may be possible to use social comparisons in enhancing a student's self-concept by using the returning college student as a role model. Since these students tend to have a positive image of self as a learner (Plotsky, 1974), it is plausable for a teacher to use them as role models.

Awareness of the role of social comparisons is especially important to teachers of mainstreamed classes. In order to prevent a negative image of self as a learner, teachers must be cognizant of the special needs of

mainstreamed pupils. Teachers should seek to minimize grade comparisons while stressing achievement comparisons.

EXPECTATIONS

Teachers need to hold positive expectations in regard to student performances as self-fulfilling prophecies tend to operate in the classroom. Positive expectations of achievement are especially important for low social status pupils, as these pupils are more likely to hold low self-concepts. Experience tends to indicate that teachers who hold high expectations receive higher quality performances. If the teacher creates positive expectations and the students meet those anticipations, the teacher has generated a major attainment in bolstering student self-concept.

BEHAVIOR

Teachers need to possess a positive self-concept. Although it may be difficult to significantly positively influence a student's self-concept, due to the difficulty in establishing one's self as a significant other, teachers with a positive self-concept can serve as role models. Providing such a positive role model may enable students to vicariously experience a positive self-concept thus instilling a desire to enhance their own self-concept.

The interpersonal influence of the teacher plays a significant role in the classroom climate emphasized the importance of an open classrcom climate in academic achievement (Doran & Sellers, 1978). The creation of a successful classroom climate requires the teacher to be an effective interpersonal ccmmunicatcr. The teacher should exhibit a caring attitude toward the students, they shculd be treated as "persons" not merely "students." The classroom climate which successfully fosters positive self-concept enhancement is characterized by: control, warmth and acceptance, cpen channels of communication, an atmosphere of success, abundant positive reinforcers, and a non-threatening environment. It is obvicus that these charactersitics are created through the interperscnal communicatien and style of the teacher. Educators must come to appreciate the importance of effective interpersonal communication in student self-ccncept development.

In addition tc interpersonal influence, the teacher who seeks to enhance student self-concept should employ a skills development model of instruction (Campbell & Martinez-Perez, 1977). By identifying specific skills, through behavioral objectives, and aiding students in achieving those skills, the teacher may be able to provide significant self-concept enhancement. Students who fail to meet the established goals will not necessarily suffer self-ccncept reversals provided teachers report such failures in a positive, supportive manner.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATAGIES

If teachers seek tc enhance student self-concept, the instructional strategies they emplcy must reflect that attempt. Therefore, teachers should consider the use of team teaching and tutors, behavioral objectives, group projects as opposed to individual problem sclving, in-depth study, and informational modeling. These instructicnal techniques tend to clarify the assignment at hand, and increase the flow of communication in the classroom. It may well be that increases in classroom communication result in increased pupil self-concepts.

SUMMARY

This essay provides much needed infcmation on the pedagogical implications affecting self-concept development, an area communication scholars have lcng ignored. After a review of the self-concept in educational contexts literature, implications of that literature were offered. Those implications centered arcund the interpersonal communication and style of the teacher. The importance of effective interpersonal ccmmunication skills of educators was noted.

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